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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the self-concept level, expectancy of success in school subjects, and actual achievement in those subjects of disadvantaged youths in high school in comparison to advantaged boys. The subjects (Ss) consisted of 100 disadvantaged and 100 advantaged boys from an urban integrated high school. No Ss were in the college preparatory curriculum. The level of aspiration was determined by requesting Ss to set down the grades they thought they would get at the end of the semester in two courses, English and science. Then, the actual achievement was obtained at the end of the semester. Self-concept was measured with a standard semantic differential instrument. Disadvantaged youths, in comparison to advantaged males, showed higher course-grade predictions, more positive self-concepts, and lower achievement. It may well be that disadvantaged boys, due in part to an inconsistent pattern of past achievement and lower achievement motivation, are less realistic and more variable than advantaged boys about future achievement levels. (Author/JM)

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Abstract

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In measuring the relationship of aspirational level, academic achievment, and self concept of disadvantaged youths, it was found that disadvantaged boys indicated a higher expectation as to final grades than advantaged boys but lower achievement. They also had a significant discrepancy between expected and actual grades, while advantaged boys were more realistic in terms of aspiration and achievement although significantly lower in self concept.

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Some social scientists interpret differences in school achievement as resulting to a great extent from individual heredity patterns and social class differences (Pettigrew, 1964). It is also believed that personality traits limit intellectual performance (Tulkin, 1968).

Furthermore, the research evidence consistently indicates a significant relationship between self-concept and academic achievement (Bledsoe, 1967; Brookover, Patterson, & Thomas, 1964; Campbell, 1967). Although social class and self-concept seem to be related to academic achievement, social class and self-concept do not necessarily seem to be related to each other. Rosenberg (1965) states, "There is no indication that the distribution of self-acceptance in a group is related to the social prestige of that group in American society." Coopersmith (1967) concurs: "Poverty and overpopulation may have deleterious consequences upon other personality traits, but ... they have little, if any, effect upon self-esteem." Moreover, based on recent evidence (Carter, 1968; Soares & Soares, 1969; Trowbridge, 1970), lower socioeconomic status and cultural disadvantagement do not necessarily produce lower or negative self-concepts in lower-class children as compared to children in better environments. Psychological reasons (e.g., less pressure to succeed academically and reinforcement of self-image by significant others in their own environment) seem to be more influential on level of self-concept, as well as academic achievement, than economic factors.

What about aspirational level in regard to achievment, self-concept, and cultural disadvantagement? For one thing, level of aspiration is thought to be closely related to the individual's self-esteem (Sears & Sherman, 1964). In

general, success tends to increase expectancy of future success, and failure tends to decrease such expectancy. But what is perceived by the individual as success or failure may be at some variance from another's perception or, indeed, from reality itself. A less stable level of aspiration tends to be associated with lower socioeconomic status (Hess & Shipman, 1965a, 1965b) and with persons whose locus of control is external, i.e., the control of events is believed to be outside the individual's power and action (Lefcourt, 1966; Rotter, 1966).

The present study was therefore undertaken to determine the self-concept level, expectancy of success in school subjects, and actual achievement in those subjects of disadvantaged youths in high school in comparison to advantaged boys. Specifically, these were the hypotheses tested:

1. There are significant differences between the self-concepts of disadvantaged and advantaged youths.
2. There are significant differences in the academic achievement of disadvantaged and advantaged youths.
3. There are significant differences in the expected level of achievement between the disadvantaged and advantaged youths.
4. There is a significant relationship among the three factors of achievement, self-concept, and aspirational level.

PROCEDURE

The Ss consisted of 100 disadvantaged and 100 advantaged boys from an urban integrated high school. No Ss were in the college preparatory curriculum. The level of aspiration was determined by requesting Ss to set down the grades they thought they would get at the end of the semester in two courses. English and science, the classes which everyone was taking regardless of his program. Then the actual achievement of the Ss in these two courses was obtained at the end of the semester.

An index score of self-concept was obtained from an instrument extensively

used with disadvantaged as well as advantaged children (Soares & Soares, 1969). This measure employs a rating scale of four spaces of distance between pairs of 40 bipolar traits. The means were submitted to a t test for comparison of means and correlational analysis.

RESULTS

As indicated in Table 1, the disadvantaged boys had higher expectations in both English and science than the advantaged boys, but their achievement level was significantly lower in both courses, though they were not failing in these courses. The discrepancy between this predicted and actual achievement was significantly larger than for the advantaged group; yet the disadvantaged boys' self-concepts were higher. These results support the first three hypotheses.

In determining the strength of the relationship of the three factors of expectancy, achievement, and self-concept, Table 2 reveals the significant correlations. Not surprisingly, for both English and science, the highest coefficients were obtained between aspirational level and self-concept. The only result that came out contrary to the research evidence (Purkey, 1970) was the low and negative correlation between achievement and self-concept.

CONCLUSIONS

Disadvantaged youths in comparison to advantaged males showed higher course-grade predictions, more positive self-concepts, and lower achievement. It may well be that disadvantaged boys, due in part to an inconsistent pattern of past achievement and lower achievement motivation, are less realistic and more variable than advantaged boys about future achievement levels. Possibly because of reinforcement from peers in areas of social interaction other than those which are school oriented, as well as a lower level of expectation of school achievement set for them by parents and teachers, the self-concepts of disad-

vantaged youths may not be so impaired as might be expected of advantaged youths who may be more highly pressured toward school success. The main determinants may very well lie, at least in part, in reachable expectation levels, a series of relative successes, and a responsiveness to the standards of those with whom they wish to associate.

TABLE 1

Significance of Difference of Aspiration and Achievement in English and Science

High school class	Aspiration M	Achievement M	Difference	Self-concept
Disadvantaged group				21.46
English	77.48	70.05	7.43**	
Science	79.23	71.46	7.77**	
Advantaged group				18.09
English	75.96	74.17	1.79	
Science	75.51	73.89	1.62	
Difference between groups				3.37*
English	1.52	-4.12*		
Science	3.72*	-2.43*		

N = 200
*p < .05
**p < .01

TABLE 2

Intercorrelations of Aspirational Level,
Achievement, and Self-Concept

Factor	Aspiration (x)	Achievement (y)	Self-concept (z)	R_{xyz}
English				
Aspiration	1.00	.48**	.58**	
Achievement	.48**	1.00	.03	
Self-concept	.58**	-.03	1.00	.77**
Science				
Aspiration	1.00	.04	.22*	
Achievement	.04	1.00	-.11	
Self-concept	.22*	-.11	1.00	.28**

N = 200
*p < .05
**p < .01

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